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WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

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FROM WALT ROSTOW
TO THE PRESIDENT
INFO GEORGE CHRISTIAN
CITE CAP82640

~~S E C R E T~~ SENSITIVE LITERALLY EYES ONLY

NOVEMBER 2, 1968

Pres file

HEREWITH A SITUATION REPORT PLUS SOME INTELLIGENCE ITEMS

1. A MINOR URGENT ITEM. SEC. CLIFFORD, WITH THE AGREEMENT OF GENERAL WHEELER, WOULD LIKE TO SEND OUT AN ORDER TONIGHT TO MOVE THE NEW JERSEY TO SUBIC BAY FOR MAINTENANCE, ETC. IT IS OVERDUE. THEY WOULD LIKE YOUR ASSENT.

YES ____ NO ✓ CALL ME ____

2. AFTER LENGTHY DISCUSSIONS TODAY, SEC. RUSK AND SEC. CLIFFORD AS WELL AS NICK KATZENBACH, GENERAL WHEELER, ETC., PROPOSED THAT WE GO OUT TO SAIGON FIRST; GET BUNKER'S COMMENTS; AND, IF HE AGREES, INSTRUCT VANCE ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES, FOR HIS MEETING TOMORROW MORNING WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE -- ASSUMING THIS IS AGREEABLE TO YOU.

A. WE WOULD PROPOSE A BILATERAL U S - HANOI MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 6; THAT IS, WITHOUT THE PRESENCE OF THE NLF.

B. THE MEETING WOULD CONSIST OF A DISCUSSION OF PROCEDURES FOR THE WIDER MEETING PLUS TWO MATTERS OF SUBSTANCE WHICH CAN LEGITIMATELY BE DISCUSSED BETWEEN THE U S AND HANOI:

-- FIRMING UP AND MAKING EXPLICIT ARRANGEMENTS ON THE DMZ. IN THE COURSE OF PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, THE DRV ONCE SAID THE DMZ COULD BE THE FIRST ITEM ON THE AGENDA. IT IS IMPORTANT IN THE U S AND FOR SAIGON THAT WE SURFACE THE DMZ AND MAKE IT FIRM.

-- LAOS. SEC. RUSK WISHES US JOINTLY WITH HANOI TO ASK THE TWO CO-CHAIRMEN TO GET TO WORK PROMPTLY FULLY TO ENFORCE THE 1962 ACCORDS ON LAOS. I BELIEVE THIS IS AN IMPORTANT THING TO DO AT AN EARLY STAGE IN PARIS BECAUSE YOU HAVE ALREADY GONE TO KOSYGIN ON THIS MATTER AND SEC. RUSK HAS TALKED WITH DOBRYNIN.

3. WE SHALL RAISE WITH BUNKER THE POSSIBILITY OF A U S MEETING WITH THE NLF PRESENT AS PART OF THE HANOI DELEGATION. THE MAJORITY VIEW IS THIS WOULD BE A SHOCK IN SAIGON. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE ALL LOOKED AT THE PROPOSITION THAT IT MIGHT BE STABILIZING IN SAIGON IF, IN FACT, HARRIMAN WERE TO SAY BEFORE AND AFTER THE MEETING THAT WE TREATED THEM AS A SINGLE DELEGATION.

BUT, ON BALANCE, SEC. RUSK, SEC. CLIFFORD, AND THE REST OF US FEEL THAT THE BEST THING TO NEGOTIATE WOULD BE A BILATERAL FOR THE 6TH. WE ARE NOT IN VERY GOOD SHAPE TO INSIST THAT HANOI NOT BRING ALONG ITS FRIEND; AND WE WILL HAVE TO MAKE A LATER DECISION IF THEY DO INSIST. A MEMORANDUM OF MAX TAYLOR'S SUGGESTS THAT HE COULD GO ALONG WITH A U S-HANOI-NLF MEETING IN WHICH WE MAKE IT ABSOLUTELY CLEAR WE WOULD DISCUSS NO SOUTHERN POLITICAL ISSUES AND TREAT THEM AS A SINGLE DELEGATION. I FEEL IT SHOULD BE BILATERAL UNLESS THE GVN CHANGE ITS MIND, WHICH IT IS UNLIKELY TO DO UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTION.

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4. WITH THE CABLE TO NIXON FROM A NUMBER OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE SENATORS; BUNKER'S STRONG FEELING THAT THIEU WILL NOT MOVE UNTIL AFTER THE U S ELECTION; AND AN ITEM WHICH I FILE IMMEDIATELY BELOW, IT SEEMS ABSOLUTELY CLEAR THAT WHETHER OR NOT ANY U S POLITICAL GROUPS HAVE PLAYED A PART, SAIGON IS HOLDING OUT TO SEE WHO IS ELECTED AND IF THE SITUATION WILL BE DIFFERENT ON THESE ISSUES AFTER THE ELECTION. SECRETARIES RUSK AND CLIFFORD --AND BUNKER--BELIEVE THE FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS AFTER THE ELECTION WILL BE FOR PRESIDENT JOHNSON TO GET THE PRESIDENT-ELECT IN; TELL HIM THE WHOLE STORY; AND INSIST THAT HE GET WORD TO SAIGON TO GET THEMSELVES TO PARIS IF THEY ARE NOT TO LOSE IN THE U S THE POLITICAL BASE FOR OUR VIETNAM POLICY. THE EXTRA ITEM OF INTELLIGENCE WHICH BEARS ON THIS MATTER IS THE FOLLOWING FROM A ONE HUNDRED PERCENT SURE SOURCE: QUOTE THIEU ALSO SEES A DEFINITE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE MOVES NOW UNDERWAY AND PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S WISH TO SEE VICE PRESIDENT HUMPHREY ELECTED. THIEU REFERRED MANY TIMES TO THE U S ELECTION AND SUGGESTED TO HIS VISITORS THAT THE CURRENT TALKS ARE DESIGNED TO AID HUMPHREY'S CANDIDACY. THIEU HAS SAID THAT JOHNSON AND HUMPHREY WILL BE REPLACED AND THEN NIXON COULD CHANGE THE U S POSITION. END QUOTE. THE ITEM IS DATED OCTOBER 26.

5. IN FACT, SEC. RUSK BELIEVES THAT YOU SHOULD NOW CALL NIXON, IN THE LIGHT OF STATEMENTS MADE BY HIS ENTOURAGE THAT PRESIDENT JOHNSON HAD GIVEN THE IMPRESSION THAT THE DEAL WITH SAIGON WAS ALL SEWED UP, AND TELL NIXON RIGHT NOW THE FOLLOWING.

-- THE DEAL WITH SAIGON WAS LOCKED UP WITH THIEU, KY AND OTHERS IN MID-OCTOBER;

-- THIEU AND KY PERSONALLY NEGOTIATED IN A GOOD, HARD BARGAINING SESSION ON 28 OCTOBER THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE;

-- THE DEAL BECAME UNHOOKED ONLY AT THE LAST MINUTE. WE KNOW SOE, BUT NOT ALL, THE REASONS WHY IT HAS BECOME UNHOOKED. IN PART, THIEU MAY BE HAVING TROUBLE WITH HIS CIVILIAN POLITICIANS; BUT IT IS BUNKER'S JUDGMENT THAT THERE IS SOME CONNECTION IN THIS HOLD BACK ON ABSOLUTELY SECONDARY ISSUES PREVIOUSLY AGREED, BEACUSE OF THE U S ELECTION.

-- NIXON SHOULD BE REMINDED THAT THIS IS EXACTLY THE KIND OF PROBLEM THAT PRESIDENT EISENHOWER, VICE PRESIDENT NIXON, AND SECRETARY DULLES HAD TO COPE WITH IN 1953 DEALING WITH SYNGMAN RHEE DURING THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS.

-- IF NIXON IS ELECTED ON TUESDAY, THE PRESIDENT WILL GO INTO THIS MATTER URGENTLY IN DETAIL, INDICATING THE STAKES INVOLVED FOR BOTH VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES IN GETTING TO PARIS SOON.

-- IN THE MEANWHILE, THE PRESIDENT WOULD WISH TO URGE NIXON THAT HE SHOULD BE EXTREMELY CAREFUL IN WHAT HE SAYS IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS SO AS NOT TO INFLAME THE SITUATION OR TO WIDEN THE GAP.

THE NATIONAL INTEREST IS THAT WE ALL FIND WAYS TO MOVE AHEAD TOWARDS PEACE.

6. IN THE FOLLOWING CIA REPORT WE GET KY'S REACTION TO WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED. HE CALMED DOWN A LITTLE WHEN HE READ YOUR SPEECH; BUT IN PARAGRAPH 6 HE IS THINKING IN TERMS OF SOMETHING LIKE A TWO-TRACK POLICY (OR EVEN ONE-TRACK) RATHER THAN GOING TO PARIS AT ALL. I WOULD GUESS THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER IF WE CAN WORK OUT THE ARRANGEMENT IN PARIS. BUT WE DO HAVE OPTIONS IF THIEU CAN'T GET TO PARIS AT ALL.

QUOTE 1.3(a)(4)

[redacted] FROM LT COLONEL PHAM VAN MINH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF VICE-PRESIDENT KY'S OFFICE WHO WAS AWARE HIS REMARKS WOULD REACH UNITED STATES OFFICIALS. HIS COMMENTS ON KY'S ATTITUDES WERE BASED ON A SHORT TALK HE HAD WITH THE VICE PRESIDENT ON THE MORNING OF 1 NOVEMBER AND ON A MORE LENGTHY CONVERSATION WITH KY THAT EVENING.

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1. VICE PRESIDENT NGUYEN CAO KY'S INITIAL REACTION TO PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S 1 NOVEMBER SPEECH ANNOUNCING A BOMBING HALT WAS ONE OF ANGER AND FRUSTRATION. KY SAID THAT THE UNILATERAL NATURE OF THE BOMBING HALT EXPOSED "THE TRUE FACE OF THE AMERICANS" AND THE NEED TO GUARD AGAINST FURTHER AMERICAN PRESSURE AND DUPLICITY.

2. BY THE EVENING OF 1 NOVEMBER KY HAD CALMED DOWN AND WAS MORE PHILOSOPHICAL ABOUT THE JOHNSON ANNOUNCEMENT. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT PRESIDENT JOHNSON HAD CHOSEN HIS WORDS CAREFULLY, RECOGNIZING SOUTH VIETNAMESE SENSITIVITIES. KY STILL BELIEVED, HOWEVER, THAT THE AMERICANS ACTED FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL REASONS, SHOWED LITTLE APPRECIATION FOR SOUTH VIETNAMESE VIEWPOINTS, AND PRESSED THEIR CONSULTATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT (GVN) WITH UNNECESSARY HASTE. STILL, KY REASONED, THE WAR MUST GO ON AND THE GVN MUST MAKE THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION AND WORK TO PRESERVE ITS INDEPENDNCE.

3. KY BLAMED THE BASIC WEAKNESS AND THE OVER-DEPENDENCE OF THE THIEU GOVERNMENT ON THE AMERICANS DURING THE PAST YEAR FOR ENCOURAGING THE U.S. TO TAKE THE VIETNAMESE FOR GRANTED. HE HOPED THIEU HAD LEARNED A LESSON AND WOULD MAINTAIN A MORE FORCEFUL AND INDEPENDENT STAND ON FUTURE ISSUES VITAL TO THE GVN'S SECURITY.

4. KY HAS GIVEN THIEU HIS ASSURANCE OF FULL COOPERATION IN REPAIRING THE DAMAGE DONE TO THE GVN BY THE BOMBING HALT TALKS. THE PAST TWO WEEKS HAVE CLEARLY BROUGHT THE TWO MEN CLOSER TOGETHER. THEY HAVE APPEARED WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY TOGETHER IN PUBLIC AND CONSULT OFTEN ON THE PHONE AND FACE-TO-FACE. IF THIEU CONTINUES TO SEEK KY'S ADVICE AND SUPPORT IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, THE FORMER DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEM MAY BE REPAIRED. KY BELIEVES THAT THIEU SHOULD PUBLICIZE THE US/GVN TALKS OF THE PAST TWO WEEKS TO SHOW THE PEOPLE THE NATURE OF THE PRESSURE THE GVN HAS BEEN UNDER AND TO DRAMATIZE THE STRENGTH OF THE GVN'S LEADERSHIP AND SO PROMOTE NATIONAL UNITY.

5. KY BELIEVES THAT THE UNILATERAL NATURE OF THE BOMBING HALT PRECLUDES BOTH THE GVN'S RUSHING TO THE PARIS TALKS AS AN EAGER PARTICIPANT AND HIS OWN PRESENCE AT PARIS, EITHER AS DELEGATION HEAD OR AS A BACKGROUND POLICY MAKER. HIS OTHER REMARKS APPARENTLY SUGGEST THAT HE FEELS THAT THE GVN HAS LITTLE ALTERNATIVE TO MAINTAINING ITS OBSERVER DELEGATION IN PARIS.

6. KY HAS SUGGESTED THAT PERHAPS IT WOULD BE BEST IF BOTH HANOI AND THE U.S. WITHDREW FROM SOUTH VIETNAM AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. HE BELIEVES THAT, GIVEN A REASONABLE DEGREE OF UNITY, THE GVN IS NOW STRONG ENOUGH TO DEFEAT THE VIET CONG ON THE BATTLEFIELD AND THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT POLITICALLY.

END QUOTE

7. THE FOLLOWING SIGNIFICANT INTELLIGENCE REPORT INDICATES THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE TEND TO LINK THE BOMBING HALT TO PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND THINK WE MAY RESUME SHORTLY AFTER THE ELECTION.

QUOTE

A REFLECTION OF THE AMERICAN BOMBING HALT IN NORTH VIETNAM WAS CONTAINED IN A 2 NOVEMBER COMMUNIQUE [redacted] 1.3(a)(4)

THE RECEIPIENT OF THE COMMUNIQUE WAS INFORMED THAT VARIOUS UNITS IN THE NORTH WERE TO GUARANTEE THAT CADRE AND SOLDIERS RETURNED TO THEIR NORMAL ACTIVITIES. HOWEVER, THE MESSAGE CAUTIONED THE RECIPIENT TO "BE ON GUARD" AGAINST A RESUMPTION OF AIR STRIKES.

THE REASON FOR THE HALT, ACCORDING TO THE REPORT, WAS DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS ENJOYED BY COMMUNIST FORCES "IN THE SOUTH". THE REPORT CONTINUED BY INDICATING THAT ALLIED FORCES WERE DE-ESCALATING IN ORDER TO "SOLIDIFY FORCES" IN THE SOUTH.

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THE COMMUNIQUE CONCLUDED WITH A REFERENCE TO THE UPCOMING U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. THE ELECTIONS WERE REPORTEDLY BEING HELD IN ORDER TO "SWINDLE THE PEOPLE". THE ORIGINATOR OF THE DISPATCH ORDERED THAT "VARIOUS UNITS" WERE TO INSURE THAT THEIR PERSONNEL REMAIN ALERT SINCE, AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, AMERICAN BOMBING IN THE NORTH WOULD RESUME.

[redacted] 1.3(a)(4)

END QUOTE

8. FINALLY, THE FOLLOWING INTELLIGENCE REPORT FROM VIENTIANE IS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE INCIDENTS OF SOVIET-CHICOM FRICATIONS OVER VIETNAM.

QUOTE

1. THERE ARE NEW SIGNS OF AGGRAVATED FRICTION BETWEEN SOVIETS AND CHICOMS IN NORTH VIET NAM. TWO OF THESE HAVE RECENTLY BEEN REPORTED TO US IN VIENTIANE.

2. FIRST IS FACT THAT SOVIET FRATERNAL DELEGATIONS GOING TO HANOI SEEM TO HAVE CEASED TRANSIT ACROSS CHINA. IT WILL BE NOTED THAT LATEST ICC FLIGHT TO HANOI CARRIES CONSIDERABLE GROUP RUSSIAN PASSENGERS. SOVIET AMBASSADOR CONFIRMED TO ME LAST EVENING THAT THESE WERE IRADE UNION AND OTHER REPRESENTATIVES WHO FOUND IT "SAFER" TO TRANSIT CAMBODIA AND LAOS RATHER THAN CHINA.

3. FROM ICC SOURCES WE HEAR THAT THERE WAS RECENTLY LARGE BRAWL BETWEEN SOVIET AND CHINESE SEAMEN. AS RESULT, SHORE LEAVES ARE RESTRICTED TO ALTERNATE DAYS. AIRGRAM FOLLOWS WITH DETAILS.

END QUOTE

9. I WILL BE FILINGN AS SOON AS I GET IT, A COPY OF THE OUTGOING TO BUNKER WHICH WILL PUT TO HIM THE STRATEGY WE PROPOSE TO INSTRUCT VANCE TO FOLLOW TOMORROW IN PARIS. YOUR EARLY GUIDANCE IS DESIRABLE, BECAUSE WE SHALL HAVE TO DISPATCH DURING THE NIGHT TO VANCE.

10M SEC RUSK BELIEVES WE SHOULD BE MAKING NO STATEMENTS ON THE SAIGON SITUATION. WE SHOULD HUNKER UP AND TAKE IT FOR A FEW DAYS. I, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN BACKGROUNDING (FOR EXAMPLE, CROSBY NOYES, HENRY BRANDON, GEORGE SHERMAN, TOM LAMBERT, PHIL POTTER) TO PLAY IT COOL; GIVE THIEU A CHANCE TO WORK OUT HIS POLITICS IN SAIGON; AND KEEP AN EYE ON THE DMZ. I DO CONFESS I AM A LITTLE WORRIED ABOUT THE SHELLING OF CITIES. I HAVE JUST RECEIVED, FOR EXAMPLE, THE FOLLOWING REPORT:

QUOTE

AT 021105 EST, THE CITY AND ARVN COMPOUND OF MY THO (POP 50,000) LOCATED 38 NAUTICAL MILES SOUTHEAST OF SAIGON, SUSTAINED AN 82-MM MORTAR ATTACK CONSISTING OF APPROXIMATELY 20 ROUNDS. INITIAL REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE ROUNDS FELL IN THE SOUTHWEST PORTION OF TOWN COVERING A WIDE AREA OF THE POPULATED PORTION. PRELIMINARY INFORMATION INDICATES THAT 10 SOUTH VIETNAMESE CIVILIANS WERE WOUNDED.

END QUOTE

I AM SURE VANCE SHOULD HIT HANOI HARD ON THIS TOMORROW--FORCING THEM TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE VC. THOSE SHELLS WERE DELIVERED VIA HANOI. WE SHOULD ALSO TALK TO THE RUSSIANS.

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